

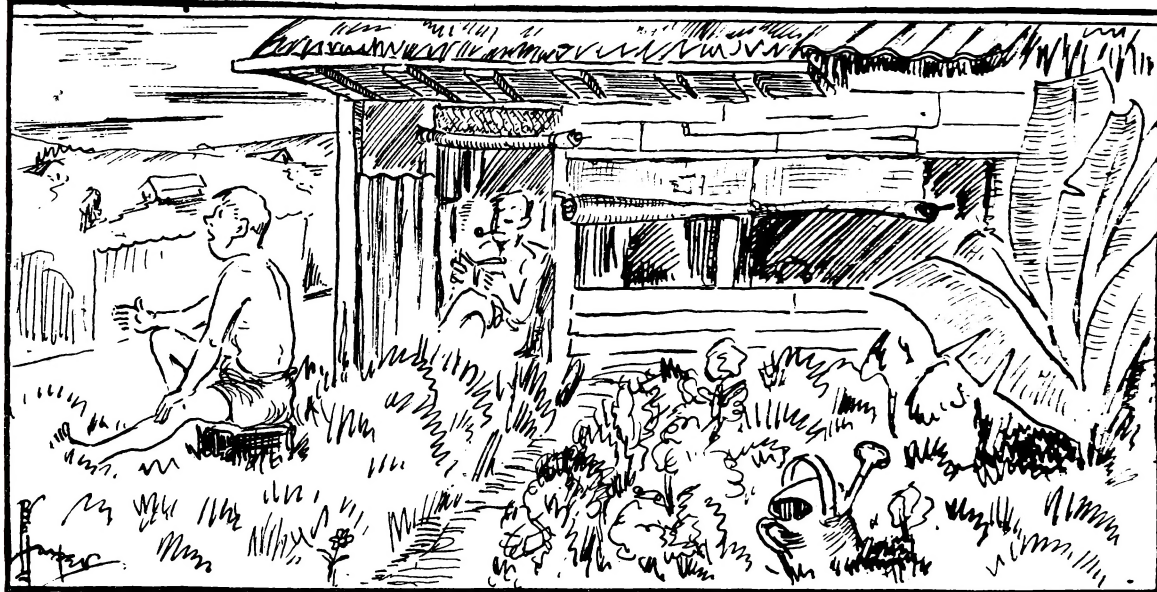
MURAL DITTIES

and

Sime Road Soliloquies

by

C.C. Brown



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C. C. BROWN

Illustrated by

R. W. E. HARPER

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Western Australia.

Meanwhile the mural ditties were not mute.

, *Milton—Lycidas.*

FOREWORD

In Changi Gaol and Sime Road Civilian Internment Camps there was prodigious literary activity, and many were the books in preparation about life as a prisoner of the Japanese. The "magnum opus" of many of these authors no doubt found a grave in the boreholes or in the incinerator of the Gaol at the time of the notorious "Double Tenth" raid by the Kempeitai on 10th October, 1943, and several other expected works have, for one reason or another, failed to appear in the bookshops. Miss Iris Parfitt's "Jail Bird Jottings" lately gave the world an illustrated picture of life as it was heroically lived in the women's sections of these Camps, and now in Mr. C. C. Brown's book of verse we have a sidelight on what it was like to be a common or garden internee in the men's sections. Mr. Brown's telling lines and Mr. Harper's brilliant illustrations will recall very vividly to all of us who were internees with them, those three and a half years of frustration and of mental and physical discomfort. It will also, I feel sure, remind the reader that, even at the time, it was all (or much of it) very funny, and that despite pre-occupation with food, the black market, hopes of release and the iniquities of "the Nips," the common man took it philosophically and discovered in the end that his time had not been so completely wasted after all.

N. R. JARRETT.

London, November, 1948.

CHIEFLY GASTRONOMIC.

I. CHANGI.

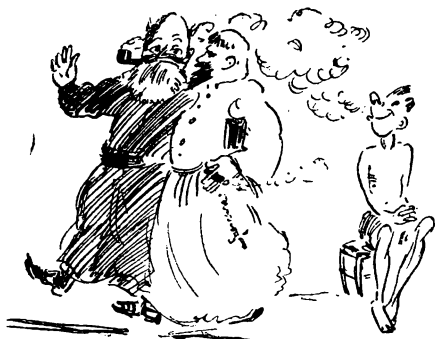
In these "light"¹ times, I look back, through
the haze

Of what's still left to me of memory,
To the more spacious alimentary days
At Changi — up to 10/10/43.²

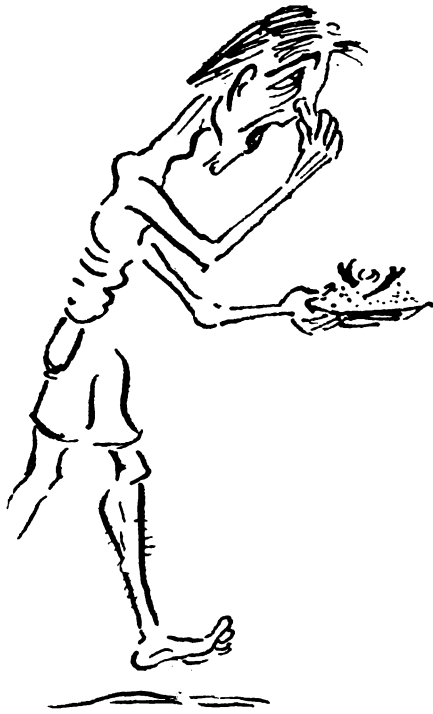
When stuff like red palm oil was "on the
camp,"³

And surplus cereals overflowed "wet
bins";

When there was still the great Miyako ramp
And even non-Sime Darby men had
"tins";⁴



When kanji reinforced with soya bean
The crudest morning appetite did sate;
When not a doctor's ribs could yet be seen
And every sort of parson put on weight.



Proteins perhaps did harshly make the
show

That thoroughgoing dieticians wish,
But now and then one had some buffalo
And liberal supplies of "stinking fish."

But when all's said and done, hogwash it
was,

We were not fed as human beings but
SWILLED,
As still⁵ we are: but then we scored be-
cause

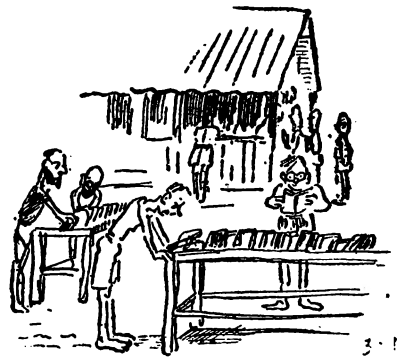
The Changi trough at least was better
filled.

1. A day on which food was more than usually exiguous was known in kitchen parlance as a "light" day.
2. The notorious Double Tenth when Changi prison was invaded by the Japanese Gestapo, with dire consequences to internees.
3. i.e., supplied as part of the rations. Towards the end of our time at Sime Road, people had to pay 7 or 8 dollars for as much palm oil as would go into a small sweet-bottle.
4. A "tin" was any sort of food in tins, either brought into Changi by internees at the outset or purchased by them while tinned provisions were still obtainable, at a price, from Singapore.
5. These lines were written early in 1945.

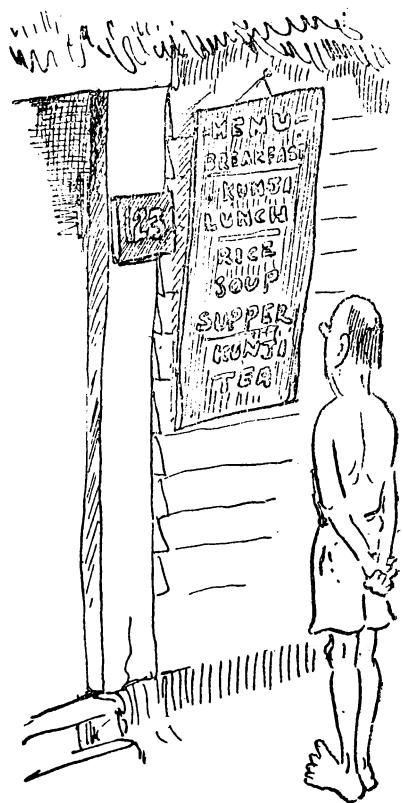


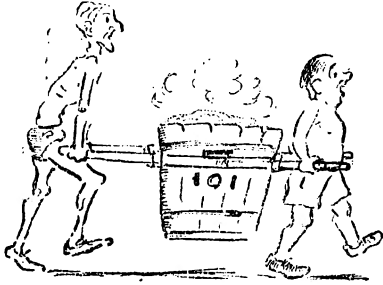
II. SIME ROAD.

He whose 'brain is going to seed'
Who 'cannot find a thing to read,'
Who 'utterly abominates'
The stirring yarns of Dornford Yates,
And can find no mental solace
In the works of Edgar Wallace,
Should come and seek his remedy
In the rich anthology
Of Internment Kitchen Lore
That can be found beside the door
Of Hut one-twenty-three!



Here, failing not to catch the eye
Of each and every passer-by,
Is hung a board on which you'll read
What Nipper may have decreed
To be the daily modicum
(Or, rather, barest minimum)
On which we wretched Sime Road sheep
Can body and soul together keep
(Always assuming that the weights
Of 'cereal conglomerates'
Are what they're said to be).

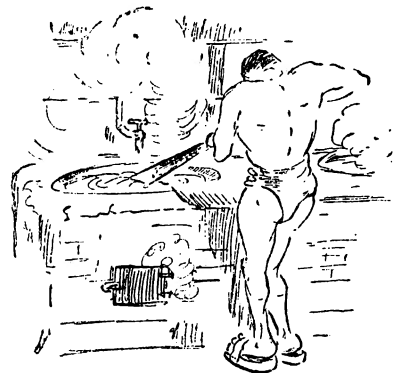




First, no doubt, your eye will stop
At KANJI, which has been the prop
And stay of our interned lives,
Stuff on which one just survives:
It is, if I may be precise,
A sorry gruel made from rice
And barely eatable unless
Maize, pea or nut disguise the mess,
Or unless you've got the 'tin'
To slip a bit of sugar in
At forty chips a pound!

Of the poor gastronomic bunch
Which our three meals compose, the
LUNCH

May be reckoned as being the pick,
Although one hardly gets much kick
Out of the standard RICE, VEG. SOUP.
But at times the culinary loop
Is looped by the ingenious Gee
With IKAN BILIS KEDGEREE!
Intriguing too is SAVOURY RICE
Though possibly not quite so nice,
In fact, as it may sound.



4-2

Some months ago, the SUPPER field
The fairest blooms of all did yield.
Seldom did it then suffice
To make the LOAF of mere ground rice.
They tricked it out with maize and pea
Until it reached its apoGEE,
The FRITTER! But, with early setting
Of the RISING SUN, we're getting
"Light" days, with supplies so low
That we've been even known to go
Quite kanji-less to bed.

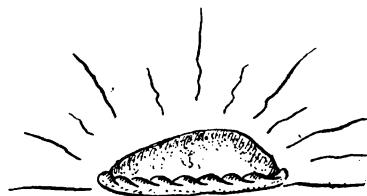
FRIED SPINACH ain't at all bad stuff
As long as they dish out enough.
For "red letter" here we may
Substitute a FISH PASTE day,
Though what we're using may not be
A Crosse and Blackwell recipe.
"Chops and Tomato sauce" are not
Alas! a Sime Road dish, but what
Would Serjeant Buzzfuzz have inferred
Had Pickwick in his note referred
To MAIZE AND PUMPKIN
SPREAD!



III. "SECONDS"¹

Said a well-known exponent of jitters,
 "It's a bit of a bore
 That we're losing the war
But to-day I get SECONDS for fritters!"

1. *Internese* for second helpings.



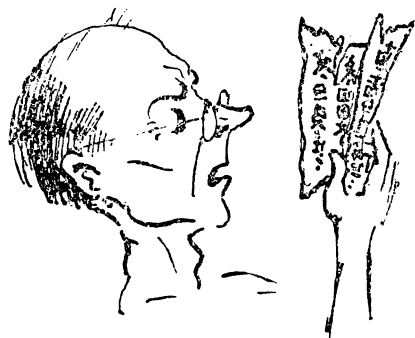
TO A DEPRESSED SINOLOGUE.

You MAY be right, of course, to treat as
 'rumour'

All you can't find in SYONAN¹ Comic
 Cuts:

But would that you'd been given a sense
 of humour

And SECONDS in the dishing out of
 guts!



1. Chinese newspapers came into Sime Road from time to time in the form of wrappings of parcels, etc., and were eagerly scanned by Chinese scholars.

THE "GARDEN."

I. A GARDEN RHAPSODY.

Why is it that to-day I follow Cato,¹
Leaving the BAYAM to the garden
"gods,"

And blithely grapple with the sweet potato
Though facing, in the "weight"² scrap,
fearful odds?

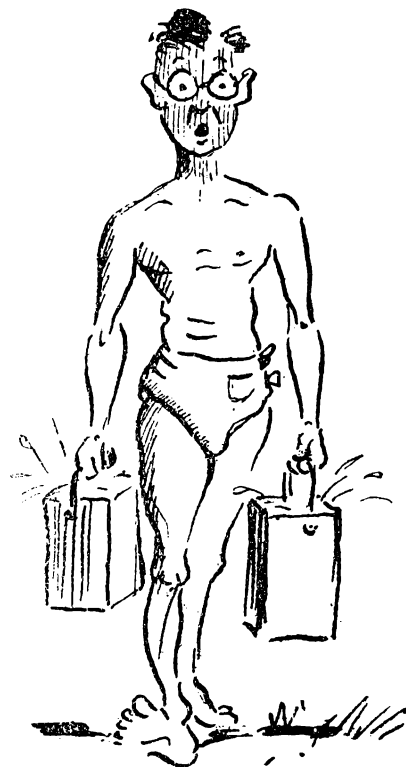
Why is it that the S.P.L.³ forsaking,
As self-denying as a monk of Prinknash,⁴
To-day I'm almost gaily undertaking

That strangely soulless task of "strip-
ping" spinach?

How comes it that to-day I'm not com-
plaining

That Bingo's late as usual with the tea,
And though a "light fatigue," am even
deigning

To lend a hand in dishing out the Pee?



1. *Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni.*

2. Vegetables brought to the kitchen had to be weighed, a matter of some rivalry between different garden gangs.

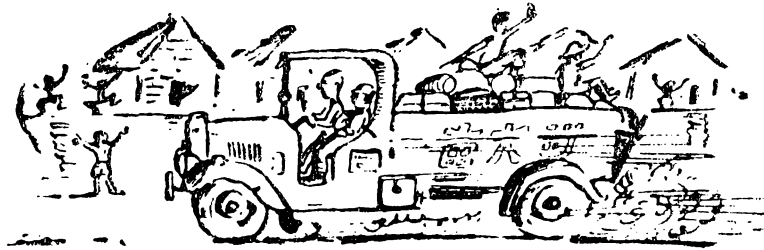
3. S.L.P. Sweet Potato Leaf.

4. Pronounced in Gloucestershire, Prinnich.

**The answer to the questions I've pro-
pounded?**

**To make you guess would be a sorry sin:
'Tis that from hill to hill have just re-
sounded**

**The glorious tidings that A LORRY'S
IN!¹**

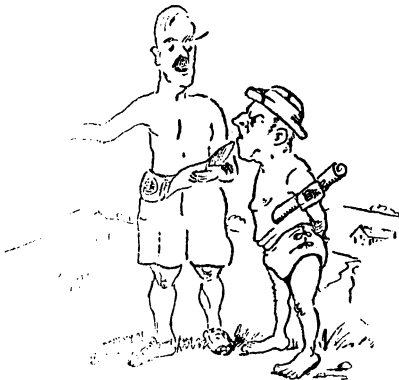


1. Bringing, with any luck, purchasable commodities such as cheroots, *gula melaka* and coffee.

II. THE LONG VIEW MEN.



**Nonentities like you and me
Who merely weed or dish out pee
Discount the probability
Of much longer captivity,
And even have the nerve to see
In the domain of Nippery
The prospects of an early dissolution.
But the Big Shots, who go around
“Discussing problems on the ground,”
On you and me have sternly frowned;
Such short term views should not be
found,
Say they, with gardeners who are
SOUND;
To point which moral, they propound
A Five Year Plan for Wood Ash Distri-
bution!**



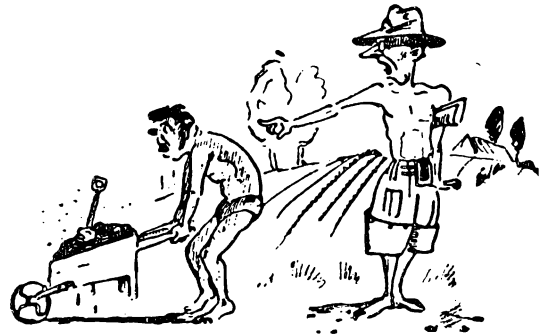
III. NON CUIVIS HOMINI . . .



I fear that I was not cut out to be
What history likes to call “a natural
leader,”
But when I pass, may it be said of me
“Here lies a man who was a natural
weeder.”
In every Sime Road ‘Hut’ you’re sure to
know
Men with an obvious gift for execration,
But few you’ll find who like myself can
show
A well-developed bump of extirpation.

IV. THE HIERARCHY.

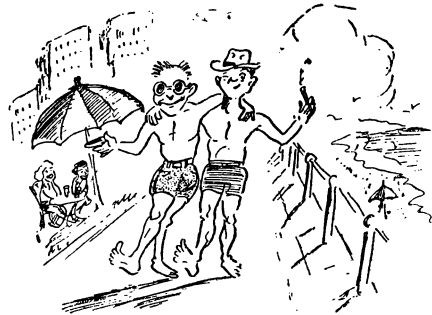
Garden FÜHRERS, like the weevil,
Are a necessary evil;
SUB-FÜHRERS, when not in spate,
I contrive to tolerate;
But must I daily have my withers
Wrung by SUB-SUB-FÜHRER
Blithers?



V. HUJAN KERIS LEMBING, NEGERI KITA.

**Doctor Thompson, Doctor Hanna,
I'm prepared to bet a tanner
You would rather like to be
Shifted from Sime Road I.C.
To Miami, to Miami!**

**There, in natty bathing trunks,
You would be devouring chunks
Of juicy steak, and blueberry pie,
And coming nicely "through the Rye,"
In Miami, in Miami!**



**I myself would be quite happy
With a transfer much less snappy:
As a good potential eater
I should like a move from Kita ¹
To MINAMI, to MINAMI!**



**That is where one joins the league
For the Adams Park fatigue,
Whence one brings home BAGS of stuff—
I want to be a "garden tough"
In MINAMI, in MINAMI!**

1. The Japanese divided the Sime Road Camp into three areas which they called Kita, Chua and Minami. A belief persisted in Kita area that the Japanese favoured Minami and that it was only if you were in that area that you had a chance of getting into the Adams Park fatigue with its good chances of rich "dividends" in the way of cheroots, *gula melaka*, etc.

HUT NOTICES.

I. "LOST — a paint brush used for
pollenating pumpkins."

Shades of Constable and Corot,
Would you kindly let me borrow
The brush that in your hands has made
Miracles of light and shade
For every age's delectation?

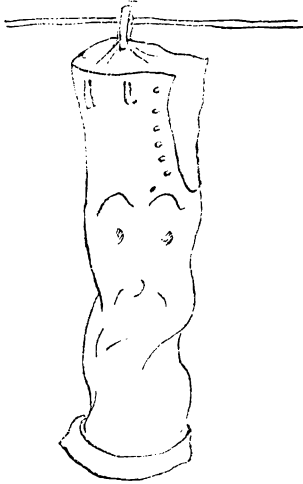
Shades of Constable and Corot,
Naught is here for sighs or sorrow,
The loan I crave you will not rue,
For with that brush I mean to do
A spot of pumpkin pollination!



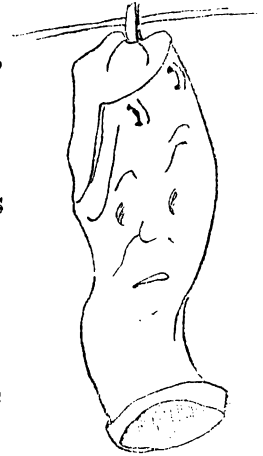
II. KITA AREA EXCHANGE AND MART.

"FOR SALE — One Trouser Leg"

AS ONE TROUSER LEG TO ANOTHER.

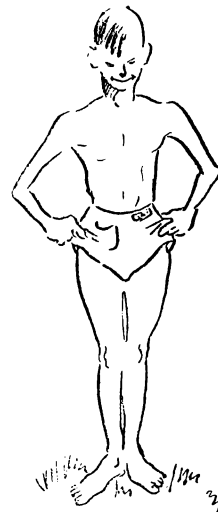


Brother, what cruel fate has sundered us?
'Twas not for this dimidiated life
That WINTER planned us, deftly cut us
out,
Gave us the motto of the P. & O.
QUIS SEPARABIT — Rather were we
meant



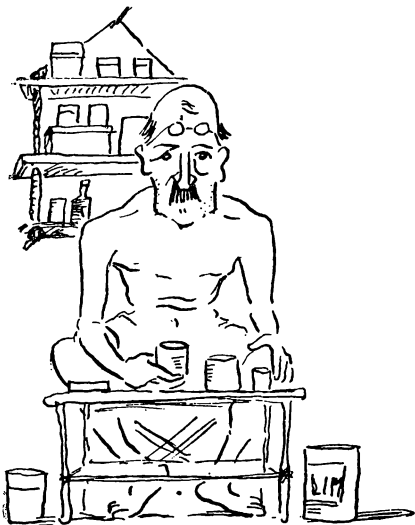
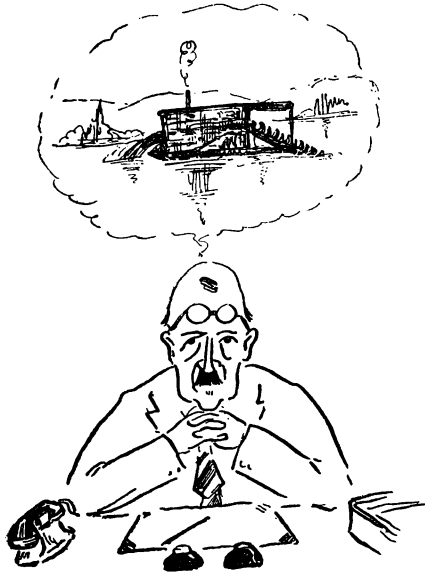
Ever to be like Saul and Jonathan,

Lovely and pleasant in our lives, and not
In death divided, gracing for all time
Some absolute pair of quintessential legs!
For thee at least, by timely recompense,
May Fate reserve some less unworthy end
Than mine! For I, O PUDOR, am become
A PAIR OF V's. — and that by WINTER'S
hand!



HUT ACIDITIES.

I. CONTAINERS



DAMON, this incarceration
Has for you one compensation:
In pre-Nip times, day out, day in,
Your one and only thought was TIN.

But here you have a wider scope,
A fuller life, a greater hope;
To-day we find you, for our sins,
Moving in a world of TINS!



Yes, MOVE'S the word. What games you
play,
You and your tins, the livelong day!
They're taken out, put back, and then —
Behold, they're taken out again!
Exhilarating stuff, no doubt,
But what on earth's it all about?

II. OTHER TRIFLES.

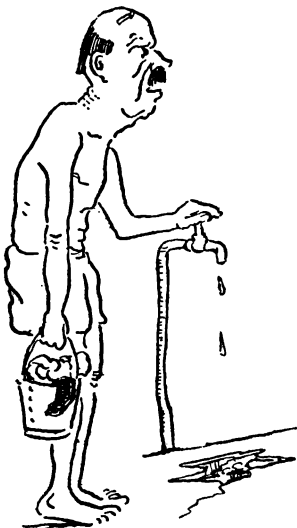


Forgive me, DAMON, if I seem to chide—
I would not friendship's privilege abuse—
But need you be quite SO pre-occupied,
With footling things like clothes-lines,
water, queues?

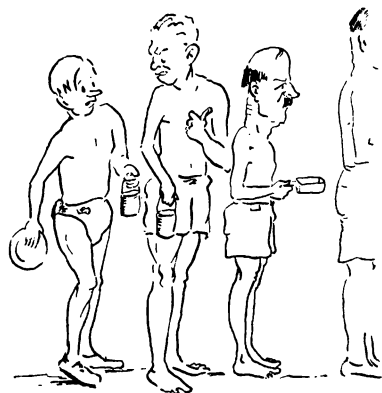
As Sime Road's chief Academician,
You shape your daily life to one design,
The realising of one fierce ambition,
To get your stuff well hung upon the
Line!



Of sanitation in a general way
By all means be a vigorous supporter,
But need you ask SO many times a day
That tedious question: "Is there any
water?"



We also wait while others stand and serve:
But tell me, DAMON, what you'd really
do
To whosoever had the something nerve
To try and jump YOUR place in any
queue!



III. NO VOICE: BUT O, THE SILENCE SANK LIKE MUSIC ON MY HEART.

Ancient Mariner.



How many things I've come to HATE

In this captivity,

From which I pray thee, kindly Fate,

Quite soon to set me free:

The washing up, the hunt for bugs,

Attendance at roll call,

Obsequiousness to "Aldgate" thugs

To raise the wherewithal:

The queuing up for this and that,

The dobying of clothes,

The strain of would-be-friendly chat

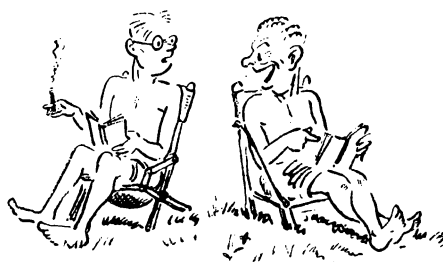
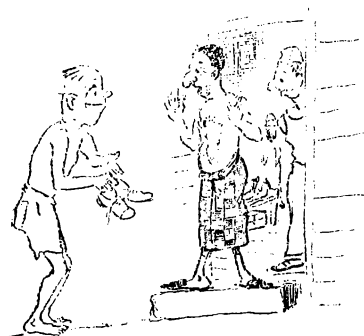
With people whom one loathes:

And that reminds me, kindly Fate,

I've just one other choice:

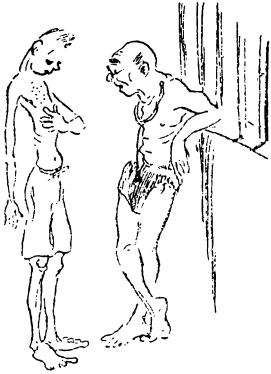
Please shift me, ere it is too late,

Far from a Certain Voice!

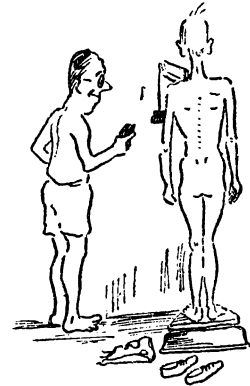


MEDICAL AND HEALTH.

I. WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.



Oh doctor, what am I to do
About this loss of weight?
At Changi I weighed ten stone two
And now I'm eight stone eight!
And that's not all — in height again
I find I've lost a lot:



I used to measure five foot ten
And five eight's not so hot!
For your complaint, Hugh Smith, replied,
You'll have no drugs to quaff:
The remedy is certified—
You'll join the Kitchen staff!



In his pre-Kitchen-worker days
Young A. was nine stone four;
Now God alone knows what he weighs,
He's going through the floor!
He once was short as he was light,
But good things 'on the hoof'¹
Have built him up to such a height
He's propping up the roof!



1. The expression used to describe any "extra," e.g., dried fish, that was served separately and not mixed up with the rice or put into the "veg. soup."

II. De DENTIBUS NON DISPUTANDUM.

(Internees wearing dentures were asked
to go to the Dental Clinic for inspection).

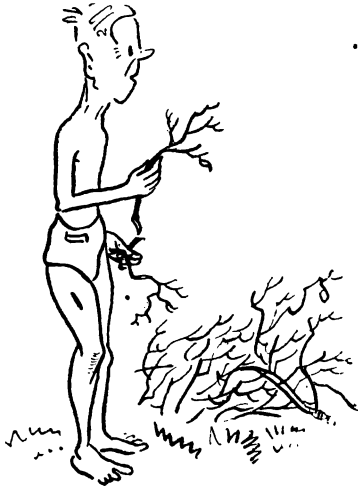
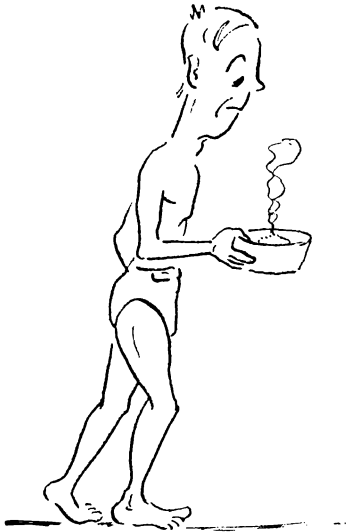
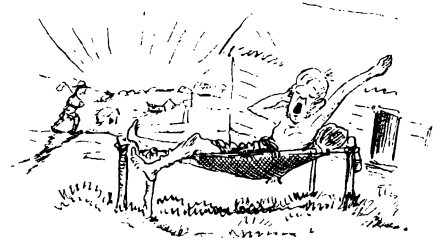
O who shall say that I have ever shrunk
From stoutly playing this internment
game,
Or that to the dregs I have not drunk
The bitter cup of a Nip captive's shame?
I've queued for Kanji and I've queued for
soup,
And never was I once known to repine,
I've even found myself among a group
Queued for attack upon the bore-hole
line!
I've queued for smokes, I've queued for
kedgeree,
I've even queued stark naked to be
weighed,
But who will blame me if I say I'll be
Damned if I queue for a False Teeth
Parade!



FATIGUES.

I. DUNEARN ROAD.

(Old Style, pre-100 grammes)¹



It's 8 a.m., high time that I was stirring
My rather wobbly early morning stumps
(On which I see that "seasonally recur-
ring"

Bugs have raised some Changi - model
lumps).

And so I hie me, at a gentle lollop,
To join the kitchen queue for breakfast
(sic),

Hoping to-day to get a handsome dollop
Of "nutmeal kanji" reasonably thick.

And now a pause for serious reflexion—

What shall I DO at Dunearn Road
to-day?

The changkul-lean, or "lighter twig" col-
lection,

To while the time least boringly away?

Neither is wholly SAFE. There have been
parties

In which I've found myself, quite rudely,
bound

To "keep in line" with real professional
hearties

In changkul-ing, I ask you, brand new
ground!

Another day (already, be it stated,
OLD Dunearn Road was going to the
dogs).

I found my "lighter twigs" were being
rated

As locally synonymous with LOGS!



1. When the Dunearn Road fatigue was first started, it was for all and sundry and every "category" was included. Later it became a "heavy" fatigue and carried a bonus of 100 grammes extra rice.



In favour of the changkul I've decided,
Not of the he-man's type my hands to
blister,

But such as on estates would be provided
For MRS. Muthu rather than for Mr.

Well, off we go. Hell's bells, here comes
Umani!

EXPERTO CREDE, this can but portend
That for cheroots to-day we've got Sweet
Fanny

Adams hopes of any DIVIDEND!

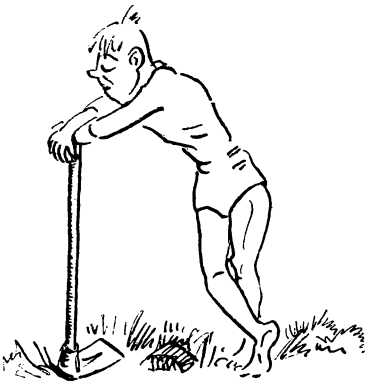
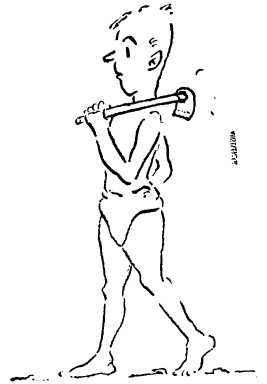
We reach D.R. "Light changkulers" are
detailed

To clear the earth from stumps of
rubber trees;

An order which by us will not be assailed
As fatal to the changkul-leaners' ease.

We lean. I ponder on the sad mutation
Which has degraded, into a mere
RIZAB¹

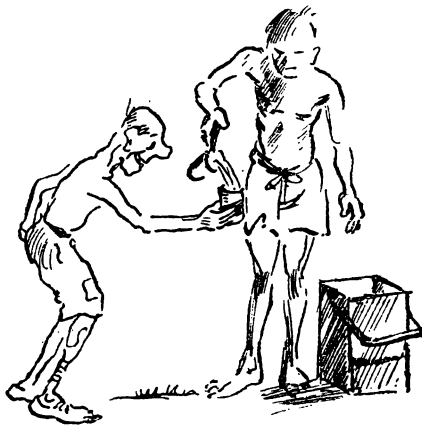
For firewood, this venerable plantation
When comes the titillating cry of "Tea's
up!"



Never at Lord's did weary leather-hunters
Greet Interval for Tea with such delight
As comes this day to Dunearn Road earth-
shunters
When from our LABOURS we gain this
respite!



1. Malay version of "reserve."



Our O.C. Group's a bit of an ichneumon:
 Our flippancy, I fear, has put his back up:
 But there's a time when even he is human,
 And that's when we are ordered to "Pack
 up!"

Don't think that we were meaning to
 malingering,
 The duty of an internee to shirk:
 But would you have mere mortals raise a
 finger
 To help the Rising Sun to do its work?



BEARS AND BULLS.



O Louis, there was once a time
When I did buy REPATS.,¹
When I for one could see no rhyme
Or reason in MOUNT BATS.

YOUR progress hither seemed each day
Appreciably slower;
While ships, 'twas said, were on their way
To take us off to Goa.

But with those ships still heav'n knows
where
REPATS. have scarce survived:
MOUNT BATS. have SHOT INTO THE
AIR

And partly have 'arrived'!²

On any day we're now prepared
To see you here EN MASSE:
And, may we add, please don't be scared
To step upon the gas.



1. In 1942-3 many people in Changi had hopes of being repatriated. The idea was that we should be exchanged for Japanese interned in India and that we should be sent to Goa, as a neutral port, for the purpose. The other school of thought looked to recapture of Malaya, by combined sea and land forces under the command of Lord Louis Mountbatten, as the only hope of deliverance. The two opposing views were known, in the language of the share market, as Repats and Mountbats respectively.
2. This was in November, 1944, when Allied aircraft arrived over Singapore and made bombing attacks on the Naval Base, etc.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY, 1944.



Ladies, with all deference,
We who live this side the fence
Feel that we could nicely do
With some 'low-down' straight from you.

We want to know how you contrive
To be so thoroughly ALIVE,
To move with all your wonted grace
Despite your three years in this place;

To look so fresh, so spick and span,
So gladdening to the eye of man;
To be so cheerful, bright and gay
Your THIRD internment Christmas Day;



To give us cunning bits of cake,
With coffee such as WE can't make
And — this is not a gourmet's dream —
Here and there a tin of CREAM!

Ladies, may we hand to you
The big bouquet that is your due?
If some of US have felt the storm,
You at least have kept your form.



COMPENSATIONS.

To internees a kindly fate
This consolation sends,
That what we may have lost in weight
We've more than gained in friends.



